

Press Club January 20th, 2003

Question 1: Yesterday there was report in media one thousand one hundred guardians from US are coming in Kosovo. Who would replace same amount of soldiers that are here leaving Kosovo? Those withdrawn forces-Would they be ready to intervene in Iraq? Will the level of readiness be the same with the changes?

General Keefe: You got a number of questions in there. First, I believe your first question had to deal with the replacement for current forces, and it will be a unit out of the 28th Infantry Division in Pennsylvania. And these soldiers are from our National Guard and Reserve. This is nothing new for Kosovo. We have a number of Reserve soldiers serving with us right now. And reservists have been serving for years in Bosnia. Rest assured they'd be well trained and ready to assume our mission when they arrive. With respect to the second part of your question, our forces here in Kosovo are strictly for the mission within Kosovo along the lines of supporting UN resolution 1244. And our focus, our mission, our instructions deal only with what goes on in Kosovo. We have no other role with any other operations in the world. Thank You.

Question 2: You said last week the Rapid Guardian Exercises started here. What is the goal of this exercise, when high officials, Military Officials, (Serbian Officials), talking about coming back in Kosovo by force?

General Keefe: The goal of Rapid Guardian is to demonstrate the will and the resolve of Nato. It clearly demonstrated how quickly Nato Forces, both airborne and helicopter can arrive in this region. I'd point out that it is a regularly scheduled exercise; we have been planning this exercise for six months to occur in January. So don't tie it to anything that occurs in Kosovo. It was a pre-planned exercise not tied to anything that is going on here. Thank You.

Question 3: As witness of events over a period of time as the Commander, What is your opinion of daily media, press, or electronic media? And how much does the press affect the future of Kosovo?

General Keefe: Thank you for that thoughtful question. From my own experience I know that the freedom of the press and the voice of the press is absolutely essential in a democratic society. And so you have not only an important role, but what you say and how you say it is essential, because people listen. First and foremost you're tasked to provide the truth, but also at the same time provide hope for the people and to provide an atmosphere in which the democratic institutions can grow. From what I've seen, you can all be proud of the direction you're taking the Kosovo media. And as you all know, most important is to be fair, to be balanced, to show both sides of any argument. Thank You.

Question 4: Two kids lost their lives in Politza before New Years. Is KFOR taking any action to clean area for other unexploded ordinances? Is there possibility of danger of unexploded ordinance in this region?

General Keefe: First off-We did two things: One, We did a thorough search of all that area for any unexploded ordinances. Second, We did an extensive campaign of information that we focused towards the schools and the parents as the students came back to school at the beginning of the New Year. Second part of your question-certainly the danger still exists. A day does not go by where somewhere in Kosovo some type of unexploded ordinance, or grenade is found or discovered. And we just all need to continue to educate ourselves, particularly educate our children and whenever any knowledge of unexploded ordinances or ordinance is known notify KPS or KFOR CIVPOL. Thank You.

Question 5: If base in Vitina is closed, Can you say more about this issue?

General Keefe: I thank you for that question. As you know in 2002 we reduced our forces, US forces, that are here from 99. Consequently, we have excess capacity for soldiers. To give you an example; Camp Bondsteel can hold up to 7,000 soldiers-we have less than 1/3 of that number of soldiers here now. With respect, we have a number of smaller, and I'm not talking about Vitina, we have a number of smaller camps that are outlined, that what I find is that it just takes so many soldiers to guard all those camps, we can be more efficient by closing some of these smaller camps. And so before we close any of these, and this is something we'll do in 2003 at selected camps, but before we do that we'll look at the security implications. We'll notify the municipal president, because we realize it has an impact on the community.

Question 6: I would like to know more about how you assess the security in your sector? Even though this sector compared with other regions in Kosovo is much better.

General Keefe: I think first that we should all be proud of our municipal presidents that were recently elected. And the way they have brought their municipalities together to form their government and I mean that across the region of MNB East. Second, I would credit it to the people that are in our region. I sense that people want to get on with their lives. We have increased examples of freedom of movement. Where people are moving between Strpce and Urosevac and Strpce and Gjilani that never would have happened three years ago. And then finally it's gotta be a close, I credit it to a close working relationship between KFOR, UNMIK, the KPS, the municipality leadership and the people of this region. It takes all of us together to make this better, a better place to live. Thank You.

Question 7: Earlier you mentioned the good and close cooperation between KFOR and the local population as much as the unexploded ordinances-How much, what level is population of organized crime concerned? What way do you plan to fight against crime?

General Keefe: Thank you for that question. Clearly organized crime is detrimental to any progress in any society. Organized criminals only have their own self-interest in mind at the expense of the people. And it runs absolutely contrary to our goals of Rule of Law. Within Kosovo, UNMIK has promised to fight against organized crime. We

support UNMIK P with weekly exchange of information and we have a very close working relationship, as you know, in this region with UNMIK P. Thank You.

Question 8: Today is the anniversary of Martin Luther King. This is also a symbol, even today, in Kosovo. We still speak or talk about human rights. Is there any type of anniversary that this day is signed by activities here in Bondsteel?

General Keefe: Well, yes there are, and not only here at Bondsteel and in Germany, but around, wherever Americans are around the world, we celebrate and we honor Dr. Martin Luther King today. And I Dr. Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement in America has a very good application to think about what is going on in Kosovo here today. In 1964 Dr. King said I have a Dream that one day all children be they black or white will live and play together. And America has come a long way. And as I've said here before, one of the strengths that we as Americans have, I believe is because of our strength and our diversity. And I know that there are many people in Kosovo that would share that same dream that someday all Serbian and Albanian children would play together and eventually work together. Thank you for the question.

Question 9: This question has to do with a statement. Chief of US Office in Pristina. He said we should give more duties to KPC and we need to create the conditions for those duties of KPC or TMP. What is your opinion about KPC, and do we need to give more duties to KPC?

General Keefe: First with respect to any comments, the one nice thing about being in a democratic military, it is left to our civilian leadership to make decisions on policy. Within our region PZ6 is our KPC organization. Within our region the KPC is making progress as a civil response organization. And we will continue to assist them in becoming a better civil emergency response organization. And we're doing this in accordance with UNMIK and KFOR directives.

Question 10: Could you please tell me how far you have reached in investigating the soldier that was found deceased at the base?

General Keefe: I think that you all know we lost a soldier this week and I'd like to extend my sincere condolences to the family of private Jasse. You know America sends its sons and daughters over here for only one purpose to make a better life for the people in Kosovo. And it saddens us all greatly when we lose a soldier. The soldier was found in his room and we have yet to complete the investigation. Thank you all very much. I find these; I hope you find these very useful and informative. And I wish you all the best as we begin this New Year.